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POSITIVE PEDAGOGY IN CRICKET COACHING: A SEASON OF REFLECTIONS

Kendall Jarrett and Elliot Wilson with Andy Siddall

Introduction

Engagement in ongoing professional development is a hallmark practice of a sport coach keen to develop their craft. As experienced coaches we recognise the value of such investment and consistently seek to expose ourselves to new coach development opportunities. Thus, when approached by Richard to write about our experiences as cricket coaches of using positive pedagogy (PPed) we reflected on what we knew about the concept to then inform how we might go about responding. With our stated interest in engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) we decided that of greatest benefit to our coaching practice would be to engage in a season-long conversation that required us to reflect upon the many different aspects and principles of PPed that influenced our coaching practice.

When developing this collaborative approach to exploring our own personal understanding and experiences of PPed, we were conscious of the need to consider the many factors that make up a successful CPD investment. Research into CPD for sport coaches over the past decade has led to widespread acceptance of the following key elements for CPD success; that CPD should be interactive, collaborative, located in practice, self-regulated and informal (Griffiths, Armour and Cushion, 2018; Nash, Sproule and Horton, 2017). For us our decision to engage in a season-long conversation held within it all of the above stated key elements for CPD success, whilst at the same time being a timely and affordable investment in our coaching development.

In addition to our desire to engage in what we saw as a unique CPD opportunity, this collaborative endeavour also meant we could invest our time in a burgeoning area of coaching research that resonated with aspects of our current coaching practice. As coaches we both strive to be athlete-centred, to develop thinking players through their empowerment as athletes (Pill, 2018). Thus, in our view there already existed a synergy between what informs what we currently try to do as coaches and what PPed offers us as a coaching resource. And despite coaching in vastly different cricket environments (see coaching context section below), our desire to explore our use and understanding of PPed in our own coaching contexts supports comments by Nash, Sproule and Horton (2017) that it is equally as necessary for coaches to advance their practice ‘whether they work at participation level... or at the performance or elite level’ (p. 1905).

Our coaching contexts

As with any reflection on coaching practice it is important to share the contexts within which we coach. Our season-long conversation took place from May to September with each of us coaching in quite different cricket environments:

- *Kendall:* I am coach/captain of a village league cricket team in rural England. The season consists of 18 weekly matches and each week there are typically three to four team line-up changes. Player ages range between 14 and 71 years old with approximately 30 players playing for the team in any given season. We have non-compulsory preseason training sessions, thus, the majority of coaching occurs on match day preceding and during play. I have 15 years’ experience coaching a number of junior and senior cricket teams in both Australia and England as well as 12 years of experience as a tertiary lecturer delivering sport pedagogy modules on a variety of education and sport focused courses.

My knowledge of PPed as a concept to inform my coaching practice has developed considerably since 2017. As one of the first contributors to Richard’s blog on his PPed website I have been at ‘close quarters’ to its development as a guiding framework for sport coaching practice. With a research background in game based approaches (GBA) and the range of instructional pedagogies this umbrella term covers (e.g. TGfU, Game Sense), the team and game focused nature of such approaches meant the teaching of certain individual sports and recreational activities that were clearly not team or game

focused was always problematic. Thus, with PPed recognised as a concept intended to extend interrogation of pedagogical practice ‘beyond games and team sports’ (Light and Harvey, 2017, p. 271), my awareness and use of PPed as an overarching pedagogical concept when coaching and lecturing has developed considerably.

- *Elliot:* For the last seven years I have acted as the talent pathway manager at Worcestershire CCC. This role has a focus on player development and effective player transition from academy to professional. From a player perspective, I am responsible for establishing a supportive learning and development environment that places significant emphasis on equipping players with life skills to survive and thrive. From a club perspective, a key focus of my role is to support a culture of individual and team growth that provides those within and outside the Academy with a positive impression of the club and the game itself. I have 20 years’ experience coaching within County academy, university and secondary school programmes along with running my own cricket coaching business. In 2009 I completed my Level 4 Cricket Coaching certificate with the ECB.

My knowledge of PPed was limited until my involvement in the CPD commitment outlined in this chapter. I believe all of the key elements associated with PPed can be found within my coaching practice, thus I was keen to learn more about the concept from the outset as a means to enhance aspects of my cricket coaching.

The season

Our season-long conversation

Questions derived from Light and Harvey’s (2017) *Positive Pedagogy for sport coaching* article were used to drive our coaching correspondence and provide a framework for a season-long reflective conversation on personal coaching practice. Our use of written email exchange as the primary method for correspondence also meant our conversation could be shared with a coaching peer at season end to invite him to comment on aspects of our PPed-related CPD. This was done at season end to maintain the reflective momentum generated by conversation involvement and to also help us to consider future opportunities to enhance our understanding of PPed.

Using key statements about PPed contained in Light and Harvey (2017) *Positive pedagogy for sport coaches* article (e.g. PPed is a framework for meeting coaching challenges through a focus away from ‘fixing mistakes’; PPed focuses on promotion of dialogue, reflection and purposeful social interaction to build intellectual self-sufficiency; PPed is used to inform current coaching practice, not redevelop it), we developed a list of questions to ask each other periodically throughout the season to stimulate reflection on our understanding of PPed and our coaching practice in general (see Table 1). For us the selection and posing of a question (typically every two or three weeks) acted as a prompt to exchange emails and reflect on a specific aspect of PPed apparent within our practice.

Table 1: List of prompt questions used to stimulate conversation and reflection on coaching practice throughout the season

Question 1	What is your understanding of positive pedagogy and how it could be used to inform your players’ development?
Question 2	How do you go about framing ‘mistake making’ in a positive light?
Question 3	How do you go about enhancing a player’s capacity to learn from mistakes and to not ‘fear failure’?
Question 4	What importance do you place on getting the socio-cultural environment ‘right’ and how do you go about this?
Question 5	When do your players typically take on more autonomy and ownership of engagement?
Question 6	When does collaborative problem solving become the central focus of a session?

Reflections

What we found when we reviewed our season-long conversation was less a ‘back and forth conversation’ about our use of PPed, but more a ‘reflective account’ of where aspects of PPed were reflected in each of our current cricket coaching practices. Thus, instead of a conversation, we present below a compilation of reflections relating to four prominent characteristics of PPed: 1) fixing mistakes; 2) viewing the game as a whole; 3) promoting social interactions, and 4) player self-sufficiency.

1. *Fixing mistakes*

Kendall: Today I shared with the team my key foci for the season ahead. I prioritised ‘fun’ and ‘mateship’ as two key values underpinning my coaching and on-field leadership along with ‘whatever each of you prioritise’. My reasoning here being the desire to support ownership of their playing experience and for each player to take on more autonomy when contributing to

the team. Specific to PPed, I did this as a means to articulate to the team my desire to be seen as a coach who is less about ‘fixing mistakes’ and more about supporting a self-sufficiency model of engagement and development.

Elliot: What you have said [in your email] reflects my views also. One of the key responsibilities for me as a cricket coach is getting players to problem solve for themselves and not being reliant on coach direction. Being brave to let players make mistakes and allowing them to fail, especially when parents are involved and they believe that mistakes are avoidable, is a challenge. The feeling a mistake leaves for a player is far more permanent than them seeing the problem solved FOR them. Ultimately, we want creative, aware, resilient, decision making, skillful players. But if we do it all for them we will not get them further any faster. PPed acts a reminder to both myself and my players that making mistakes and fixing them yourself are GOOD THINGS for cricketers to experience.

2. Viewing the game as a whole instead of its component parts

Elliot: We always look to see if we can make practice and training look and feel like the game as opposed to practice. In essence we are trying to view the game as a whole instead of its component parts which is a key message in the PPed literature. Running alongside this is a focus on developing tactical awareness through problem solving which in my opinion is easier to achieve if players are approaching training (and thus developing behaviours) the same way as they would a match.

Kendall: This is less challenging for me as having no in-season training sessions scheduled means that viewing the game as a whole, instead of its component parts, is the norm for players. For me as coach this situation means that players seem to quickly become accustomed to viewing the game as a challenge in its entirety because there is limited opportunity to break down their development into component parts. I believe what this also inadvertently does is promote a sense of reliance on the resources present – that being themselves and their teammates.

3. Purposeful social interaction

Kendall: Three key pillars of PPed are: 1) the facilitation of dialogue; 2) reflection; and 3) purposeful social interaction. After a number of losses leading into the mid-season stretch of matches I was keen to alleviate the pressures of match day performance that had taken hold of the team. Team discussions prior, during and post-match are commonplace in cricket yet the

tone and focus of these deliberations can be negative and unconstructive. So, last week I trialled a more purposeful and positive approach to social interaction encouragement. Prior to fielding, at the fall of a wicket, and after drinks breaks I tried to facilitate more purposeful and humor-laden 'team chats' designed to get players to remind themselves of overall game strategy and to outwardly discuss and reflect on positive aspects of their match performance. I have also spoken about the importance of partnerships (e.g. working together in a bowling partnership) and have encouraged some of the younger players to ask questions of their older teammates post team chat to help strategize and implement game plans. This seems to be working well with comments back from younger players acknowledging the performance-related benefits of these chats.

4. Promoting player self-sufficiency

Elliot: Your mention of experience ownership resonates with me and what we do here. Right from my first interaction with new Academy members I place considerable importance on the player experience. So I am constantly looking at player interaction, engagement and feedback. We want everything we do in the Academy to be fun, competitive and challenging. Throughout the summer we have regular touch points, usually via the sharing of short video messages. The flavor of these is to encourage reflection on performance. We ask players to label how their performance made them feel with the aim to look at how to re-create that feeling or how to change it. We found this a creative way to encourage reflective practice.

Kendall: Engaging players in reflective practice is a key for me too, although limiting myself to the asking of questions instead of offering specific verbal directions has been challenging - especially when working with younger players e.g. 14-16 yrs. For the younger players articulation of feelings and how to action tactics and strategy is rare when asked in group settings, as typically the older players are more confident and au fait with required responses. Knowing when to ask questions (i.e. when in 1-on-1 conversation or within a group) and what questions to ask (i.e. whether it relates to a team strategy or an individual bowling/fielding tactic) continues to be a focus of mine during matches.

Evaluations

Our understanding and use of PPed

Each reflection above holds within it discussion of a key aspect of PPed and in doing so reaffirms how closely our current coaching practices are aligned to the practices of PPed. Only

few reflections ended up outlining an intentional change in practice to better reflect principles of PPed e.g. the introduction of more purposeful team chats on match days and the encouragement of one-on-one conversations between younger and older players. It is important for our own coaching development around future use of PPed, though, to detail; 1) what went well and what didn't go so well; 2) what we learnt about ourselves as coaches (specifically cricket coaches); and 3) what we could do more of to inform our use of PPed in our respective coaching contexts.

What went well and what didn't

Our facilitation of key elements of PPed, such as the promotion of opportunities for peer dialogue and purposeful social interaction, created few challenges for us both as the facilitation social learning opportunities reflects existing coaching practices. However, recognising when and how to assist players build their intellectual self-sufficiency was a challenge, especially during the latter part of the season. We believe this to be a result of the pressures of competition involvement and players' expectations about the role of the coach in helping to 'fix mistakes'. Furthermore, when responding to a player's technical weakness our emphasising of what they CAN do often manifested into a somewhat challenging coaching episode, particularly when working with junior players. It was often the case then that each of us would resort to offering specific verbal directions/instructions which in its purest sense overrides the PPed principle of dialogue engagement and question asking. For us as coaches working with modern adolescent players there is an inherent challenge in designing and supporting a development environment that modern adolescent players can relate to and stay committed. We feel, however, that the concept of PPed when used as a framework to coach adolescent cricketers supports our existing commitment to humanistic coaching endeavours (for more on this see the first and second editions of this book).

It is an obvious thing then to say that the key principles that underpin our current coaching practice are neatly aligned to the principles of PPed - but not all. At times finding the right balance between player autonomy and coach encroachment necessitated a not-so-positive learning experience which conflicted with stated principles of PPed (e.g. when determining team selections based on match day coaching strategy). We believe the coveting of such situations (specifically in elite level sport coaching contexts) can be an effective tool for coach/player/organisation development if managed appropriately.

What we learned about ourselves as coaches

Engaging in a season-long conversation framed around the concept of PPed meant an opportunity for serial commitment to coaching practice reflection. We feel our use of PPed to frame our season-long conversation served to heighten our already existing interest in our own pedagogical practice whilst also reinforcing our personal coaching philosophies. With regards to our respective use of PPed:

- *Kendall:* I learnt that the process of introducing more purposeful social interaction opportunities was generally well received by players no matter what their age or length of time playing for the club. When I asked players why they thought I was trialling a new coaching approach the common response received was that I was a coach who ‘wanting to help us all improve’ (Player quote). I also learnt that the most challenging aspect of using PPed over the season related to my often perceived need to effect change swiftly through my ‘telling’ of players rather than encouraging them to affect their own change through my asking of questions.
- *Elliot:* Throughout the season I became more accustomed to ‘catching myself out’ when slipping into ‘tell’ mode. For me this highlighted the occasions when I was not being strong in my commitment to my coaching principles e.g. to be fun, competitive and challenging. In the eyes of many the role of the coach is to plan training sessions, establish behaviours, and set game plans. I see my role as a coach as much more than just these transactional moments. My point here being that as a product of being involved in this season-long conversation I now understand the concept of PPed to mean ‘coaching that is transformative’ which through its application asks me to be ‘braver’ in letting players make mistakes to ultimately inform their development.

A peer coach perspective

Nelson et al (2013) discuss the coaching practice benefits gained from active learning interactions with coaching mentors and fellow coach collaborations. Thus, to offer further insight on our understanding and use of PPed as cricket coaches we shared our conversation with a coaching mentor (Andy) to seek additional perspective on our season-long reflections.

- *Andy:* I have 20 years’ experience coaching in a number of cricketing and educational environments. This includes working as a development coach at Yorkshire County

Cricket Club and as Academy Director at Leicestershire County Cricket Club. I have also acted as a coach educator on the ECB Level 2 award.

Andy's perspective

During my 20 years of coaching it has been common practice for cricket coaches to engage with CPD through attendance at the odd course or visiting another sporting organisation. We expect players to improve year by year, week by week, game by game but rarely have I witnessed coaches being prepared to shine the light on themselves in such a serial manner and to reflect, analyse and share their experiences with a colleague in order to be better tomorrow than they were today. To that end I felt that the journey Kendall and Elliot embarked on with regards to their season-long exploration of PPed to enhance their coaching practice has considerable upside.

Challenges I offer both coaches moving forward:

1. How will you both best deliver PPed principles in the aspects of the game which are very technical and individualised, where there is very little scope to view the game as a whole?
2. How might an academy coach in a professional cricket club (often judged on player throughput into the professional game) justify use of PPed to develop players' self-sufficiency capacities within the limited time scales available to them?
3. How are you both going to influence other coaches in your club to embrace principles of PPed to inform their own coaching practices?

What can we do in the future?

From our perspective as cricket coaches, what resonated with us was the potential of PPed to be used as a means to offer broader suggestions about pedagogical offering that coaches could reflect upon e.g. how to view the game-as-a-whole and how not to focus coaching efforts on the fixing of mistakes (Light and Harvey, 2017). As a coaching concept we see potential benefit in fellow cricket coaches reviewing and taking note of what PPed can offer them as coaches just as we have done. It is important to note, however, that this season-long focus on our use of PPed lacked a degree of practice verification. As a result we agree that, despite having access to a coaching peer who offered us an end-of season perspective on our understanding and use of PPed, an on-site coaching peer or mentor able to view and feedback on how we were actioning the concept of PPed 'in real time' would have been beneficial. Furthermore, we learnt that better management of players' expectations about what PPed means and what it can offer

them as athletes prior to season start is advisable. Our failure to adequately do this, particularly when liaising with younger players' parents (in an elite programme) and older players (in a village team) meant the occasional stalling of PPed as a coaching concept and time lost through having to reset player expectations.

A full response to the challenges Andy presented to us via his role as our peer coaching mentor is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, we feel compelled to respond to Andy's first challenge in order to showcase how we might coach the technical requirements of cricket through use of PPed. With elements of batting, bowling and fielding in cricket being highly technical we have and will continue to use the following activities to develop players' skills with a game-as-a-whole emphasis:

1. Setting of scoring zone restrictions for batters during net sessions (e.g. can only score behind square) requiring them to focus on and make constant adjustments to specific shots.
2. The removal of the off-side netting of the end net to allow fielders to practice aspects of fielding technique and positioning as well as encourage captain-bowler communication with regards to delivery choice and field settings for different game situations.
3. Getting bowlers to bowl with their front arm pinned to their body as a starting point to help them explore the influence of technique on pace generation. Such activities are accompanied by questions such as 'How did that feel?', 'What effect did this have on your pace?', 'When might a change of pace in a match be effectively utilised?'

Summary

We believe our engagement in a season-long coaching conversation driven by reflection on the key principles of PPed included a range of CPD success elements; namely that the experience was interactive, collaborative, located in practice, self-regulated and informal (Griffiths, Armour and Cushion, 2018; Nash, Sproule and Horton, 2017). Our use of the principles of PPed to inform our development as cricket coaches provided us with an engaging framework to guide our reflection on coaching practice and stimulate engagement with our coach mentor. With existing personal coaching principles already closely aligned to the principles of PPed, our reflections (in addition to comments made by our coach mentor) reveal a growing understanding of PPed and appreciation of its value to coaches in both professional and village cricket contexts.

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